**The Great Outdoors**

**Elizabeth City Beckons Travelers Who Seek the Great Outdoors**

Bounded by the Dismal Swamp to the north and the Pasquotank River to the southeast, Elizabeth City is surrounded by waterfront vistas and rustic trails. Is it any wonder that this North Carolina destination is attracting more and more visitors who want to get back to nature?

Opportunities for boating, hiking, biking, paddling and bird watching are plentiful in the Elizabeth City area. And there is no better time to enjoy the great outdoors than the spring and fall.

“The shoulder seasons are peak times for natured-based travel in the Elizabeth City area,” said Charlotte Underwood, director of the Elizabeth City Area Convention and Visitor’s Bureau. “We offer a variety of experiential itineraries, whether it’s a birding expedition, trail hike or chance to explore the Pasquotank River and the Dismal Swamp by boat.”

More than 125,000 acres comprise the Dismal Swamp, one of North America’s great wetland forests that straddle the North Carolina/Virginia border. One of the best places to gain access is at the Dismal Swamp Canal Welcome Center and Dismal Swamp State Park in neighboring Camden County.

Located on the canal, the Welcome Center is the only such facility in the country to greet visitors by car and by a historic waterway. Here, the friendly staff is known for going the extra mile. They help with travel directions, sightseeing recommendations and even invite boaters to trade paperbacks in their boater’s book exchange. Two trails are located just outside the Welcome Center. The quarter-mile Nature Trail is great for stretching your legs. For a longer hike, take the 4.5-mile Dismal Swamp Canal Trail, part of the North Carolina Birding Trail and East Coast Greenway, which extends from the Welcome Center to the village of South Mills.

Visitors can walk from the Welcome Center across a swing-span bridge to the visitor center at the Dismal Swamp State Park. With interior exhibits that interpret the history and biological make-up of the swamp, it’s a wonderful resource for learning more about the region’s rich habitat.

After visitors have a chance to tour inside, they can explore outdoors via a raised boardwalk or go for a longer hike among the 16.7 miles of hiking and mountain-biking trails into the park’s interior. Visitors can rent bikes for traversing the park’s interior trails and kayaks for a paddling excursion on the historic Dismal Swamp Canal.

Native stands of Atlantic white cedar thrive here, as well as deer, river otters and rare plants. Migratory, neo-tropical birds and a significant number of butterfly species also make the state park home.

For travel information and suggested itineraries, call the Elizabeth City Area Convention & Visitors Bureau at 1-866-ECity-4U (1-866-324-8948) or (252) 335-5330 or go to [www.DiscoverElizabethCity.com](http://www.DiscoverElizabethCity.com).

**Sidebar: The Dismal Swamp’s “Lady of the Lake”**

The Dismal Swamp has inspired many a poet and writer. The Irish poet Thomas Moore’s poem, “The Lady of the Dismal Swamp,” written in 1803, is based on a local legend about an Indian maid who died just before her wedding. She is sometimes seen, the legend goes, in the company of her lover, paddling a ghostly white canoe across Lake Drummond. An excerpt reads:

 *“But Oft, from the Indian hunter’s camp*

*This lover and maid so true*

*Are seen at the hour of midnight damp*

*To cross the Lake by a fire-fly lamp*

*And paddle their white canoe”*

Is the firefly lamp truly the “lady of the lake,” or is it Foxfire, a luminescence given off by decaying wood or plant remains? Pass a midnight hour by the lake’s shores, then *you* decide.